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MILITARY BROTHERHOODS

THE ENGLISH ESSAY

1896

BY

WILLIAM KEATLEY STRIDE, B.A.

EXETER COLLEGE

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"Fais ce que dois, adviegne que peut,
C'est commandé au chevalier."

Ordinances of Chivalry.

MILITARY BROTHERHOODS.

It is impossible, in considering those Military Brotherhoods which for centuries seemed to men the realization of the highest ideal of Christianity, not to reflect that they would have worn a strangely different aspect to the first disciples of the Christian faith. The fathers of the early Church indeed would probably have shrunk with horror from an association of ideas which would have seemed to them blasphemous and even a contradiction in terms. For the announcement of Peace on Earth and the universal Brotherhood of Men in Christ, which were the striking features of their creed, might well have seemed to them to be totally opposed to the idea of war,—and especially to the idea of a war of religion, such as that in which Military Brotherhoods had their origin. Yet the foresight of the Founder of their faith had been clearer than theirs. Universal fraternity was an ultimate ideal, to be realized only after universal strife; and the same lips which had seemed to prophesy the coming abolition of war in the declaration, "All ye are brethren," had delivered the mournful warning that Christ had come not to send peace on earth but a sword.

At the outset of this essay, therefore, a question has to be answered. By the twelfth century, when the first Military Brotherhood was founded, the highest type of Christian excellence outside the order of priesthood was no longer the meek martyr of the early Church nor the solitary hermit of a later age, but the warlike knight of the Crusades. What then were the influences which had so completely changed the ideals of Christianity? The answer is a complex one. They were partly political forces without and partly social forces within the Church,—forces, that is, some of which were Semitic and Mohammedan while others were Teutonic and Pagan.

Mohammedanism differs from the other two great religions of the globe in this, that while Buddhism no less than Christianity is a gospel of peace, the creed of Islam is essentially a warlike creed. The words of Ali, Mohammed's first disciple, express the attitude of its votaries to all but "the faithful": "Whoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly." Force has been the means of its propagation, and its disciples have offered to conquered foes the alternative of the Koran or the sword. The success of this religion was at first so rapid and startling as to inspire Christians with profound feelings both of fear and admiration. It faced Europe on the northern shores of Africa. It flanked her by its conquest of Spain in the west. It harassed her coasts by its supremacy on the Mediterranean. In the eighth century it had even pushed far into Gaul, till Christendom, brought to bay, took up arms in almost despairing imitation of its great foe, and checked the victorious advance of the Crescent once and for all on the broad plain south of the Loire. The God of Battles had declared himself on the side of the Cross: henceforth it might seem that to fight against the infidel was to fight the battles of the Lord.

Before this grander strife between Christian and Moslem, however, wars and rumours of wars had already disturbed the internal peace of Christendom. The virtues of the northern barbarians who had been brought under the influence of the Church were pre-eminently warlike virtues. Even as early as the fifth century bishops are to be found in arms. The roots of the Chivalry, which was to arise in Charlemagne's time and thereafter to crown warfare with a halo of romance, lie deep down in Teutonic institutions. Lands were held under an obligation of military service. Above all, in the ascetic minds of hermits and monks dogma had from the earliest ages of the Church taken that foremost place which in other men was occupied by the natural affections; and now from the desert or the cloister the voice of a recluse, inspired with but a single idea, and fired with a fierce fanaticism, began to direct with tremendous authority the alliances or enmities of semi-civilized and semi-Christianized chiefs. Thus from the days when Christianity had become the faith of the shattered world which had once owned Rome as its mistress, an ardent and warlike spirit had been transforming the triumphant

religion. From time to time small outbreaks had taken place, and much of modern Europe had been devastated by wars, such as those between the Catholic Franks and the Arian Lombards or Burgundians— wars undertaken nominally at least from religious motives; and this sentiment, so strangely compounded of an inherited love of fighting and of a bigoted devotion to a lately-acquired faith, needed only some powerful external force to fan it into a general flame. The necessary force was supplied by the renewed activity of Mohammedanism in the East, and the occupation by the infidel of the holy shrines at Jerusalem.

It may at first appear strange that the outbreak was so long delayed. Mohammed had died early in the seventh century, and it was not till the end of the eleventh that the first Crusade was preached. But two causes had contributed to the delay. Not only had the death-agonies of the ancient and the birth-throes of the modern world reduced Christendom to a condition of great exhaustion, but the Arabs, those "Italians of the East," who had been the first people to adopt the religion of the Koran, had exchanged "fanaticism for culture" and displayed a real if limited tolerance to the Christian worshippers in Palestine. In the eleventh century, however, both conditions had changed. A crowd of barbarous Turcomans, newly converted to Mohammedanism, drove out the more polished Saracens from the Holy Land, and tortured and killed the Christian pilgrims. At the same time, Christendom had under the leadership of Hildebrand begun to be conscious of its spiritual unity, and the same year[a] which saw the shrines of Jerusalem and Bethlehem violated again by this new barbaric horde saw also the Emperor at Canosa a shivering suppliant in the snow before the Pope. Thus though the great pontiff was prevented by his quarrel with the Emperor from carrying out the grand Christian league against the infidel which he had planned, Urban II was able to realize the dream of his predecessor, and to present to the world the spectacle of a Christian Caliph wielding a power which for the first time for centuries could challenge comparison with that of the Commander of the Faithful. The preaching of Peter the Hermit sent the hot blood of religious enthusiam coursing through the veins of Europe. Paupers and princes vied with each other in zeal for the recovery

[a] A.D. 1077.

of the Holy Sepulchre; an enormous though motley force was launched against the infidel conquerors of Palestine; and the curtain rose upon the great heroic drama of the Middle Ages.

At once it was evident that a wonderful change was passing over Christendom. The two strongest influences of the time, the spirit of the warrior and the spirit of the priest, which had—in theory at least—been so long and so sharply opposed, were now working for a common end against a common foe, and the victory of the Cross over the Crescent was no less keenly desired by the priest than by the warrior. The adventurous, ardent, and fierce instincts of the Teutonic races were now not only allied but amalgamated with, not only sanctioned but sanctified by, the devout and humble though equally ardent spirit of Christianity.

We have already traced the curving line along which Christianity had travelled till it seemed to be pursuing a course diametrically opposed to its original path. We have now to follow the other half of the circle and to consider an equally strange phenomenon: the manner in which the ferocity of the barbarian warrior was transmuted into the valour of the Christian knight. The fighting-spirit had already made soldiers out of saints: the religious spirit promised to make saints out of soldiers.

Our earliest knowledge of Teutonic customs comes from Cæsar and Tacitus. In the *Commentaries* and the *Germania* we find that the initiation in arms of the young warrior was performed with great solemnity. The time, the place, and the actors were regulated by immemorial custom, and the possession of the shield and spear by the German marked the attainment of manhood as clearly as the assumption of the toga by the Roman. When the northern barbarians were converted to Christianity, this ceremony, which had been perhaps the most solemn act of the Pagan's life, seemed to offer a magnificent opportunity to a Church which was ever wont to make the most of such openings. If in hallowing it she seemed to be approving of war, she could urge on the other hand that she would thereby humanize war. And so the initiation gradually became a religious ceremony, till in the eleventh century it was not till after fast and vigil, prayer and confession, absolution and solemn sacrament, that the valiant and noble youth was formally admitted into the ranks of Christian warriors. It is not possible to ignore the similarity between his noviciate

and that of the priest: it is hardly more possible to believe that so striking a similarity was not at any rate partly conscious.

Wholly conscious perhaps indeed it was not. But in that case the parallel is all the more remarkable, and provides a striking illustration of the real affinity between Christianity and warfare,—between the Brotherhood of Faith and the Brotherhood of Arms. For if men had been drawn closer together by the religion of Christ, it must not be forgotten that warfare had already proved a powerful bond of union, and that instances of comradeship in arms are to be found in the records of almost every nation. This is especially true of the peoples of Europe, and the ἑταῖροι of the Homeric poems, the "comites" of the *Germania*, and the "gesiths" of the West-Saxon laws, may fairly be considered as instances of this widespread tendency. In the far north, indeed, the tie was drawn closer still, and, by sharing in an ordeal repugnant to modern ideas, brothers-in-arms became in a sense brothers in blood. Even to this institution the Church gave her sanction, and the savage ceremony was thereby elevated into a solemn religious act, the knights promising in the presence of priests and relatives that they would observe "vraye fraternité et compagnie d'armes." Military Brotherhood had thus existed in the abstract for centuries before the first Military Brotherhoods were formally constituted.

We have now seen what causes had so completely changed the Christian ideal. And the discovery of these causes has brought to light another fact,—that the Crusades were the fruit rather than the root of that tree of mediæval Chivalry which, springing from a wild stock, had been modified in its very nature by the graft of a spirit of Christian devotion. Now just as Chivalry was the tree-trunk of the Crusades, so their choicest flowers were those Military Brotherhoods which in their ideals and early constitution —and also, alas, in their short-lived splendour—may be called the aloe-blossoms of Catholicism.

The secret of their earlier glory is not difficult to discover. They occupied a position at that time unique in Christendom. In them it might seem that the religious had at last conquered the militant ideal, for in their inception they were not military but charitable. Even the Templars, who were soldiers from the first, fought originally only in defence of the pilgrims for whose

protection their order was founded. Three Brotherhoods alone[b] —the Templars, the Hospitallers, and the Teutonic Knights— sprang from any feeling that was at once military, religious, and universal. There were several military religious orders in Spain and Portugal, but they took no part in the Crusades in Palestine. They grew indeed out of the long conflict between the Moors and the descendants of the West-Goths, and were closed to foreigners, if not by direct ordinance yet by the comparative isolation of the peninsula in the Middle Ages. It is true that the Teutonic Order had been at first restricted to men of German birth; but German was a word of wide meaning, and "Germany" had no natural boundaries; while the sea, the ocean, and the abrupt wall of the Pyrenees parted the chivalry of the Iberian Kingdoms from that of other lands. As for the numerous orders of Knighthood in the various countries of Europe, they were not really military or religious, though their members were knights, and their proceedings were opened and closed with religious ceremonies. Nor were they ever intended to be universal. They were in fact either purely honorary orders, like the Garter, the Golden Fleece, or the Elephant, which were founded by sovereign princes and confined to a small number of distinguished members, or, like the orders of the Argonauts of Naples, the Sword and Belt of Sweden, and the Holy Ghost of France, were instituted for some special reason, such as the encouragement of trade, the reward of military merit, or the furtherance of national unity. It would, therefore, tend to obscure our view of the greater Military Brotherhoods to attempt to consider in the same essay with them either the strictly national orders or the later creations of that bastard chivalry which marks the close of the Middle Ages.

The early history of the Knights of St. John may serve as an illustration of the spirit which at first animated them all, and it is a significant fact that the primary patron-saint of that Order was neither the fiery Galilean apostle who would have called down fire from heaven upon unbelievers, nor the hermit who preached in the wilderness of Judea. Their work was to be that of St. John the Almoner, and it was from him that they took their name.

[b] There were one or two smaller orders, such as those of St. Lazarus and St. Sepulchre, which resembled the others in essentials, but besides being small they were founded for special rather than general reasons.

Nearly a century before the first Crusade, then, some wealthy and pious merchants of Amalfi had set up near the Holy Sepulchre a hospice for sick and poor pilgrims. It was supported entirely by private benevolence, and its operations were necessarily circumscribed. The Crusade, however, proved its value, for wounded soldiers of the Cross were cheerfully and tenderly cared for by the rector of the hospice, and Godfrey of Bouillon himself and many of the wealthiest of the Crusaders endowed it with lands and money. Many others, too, exchanged the work of smiting for that of healing, as a task at once more humble and more noble, and devoted themselves to the relief of distress. The Hospital quickly became more famous and powerful, and soon outgrew its original constitution. The rector therefore persuaded the brethren to form themselves into a regular monastic community; the Patriarch of Jerusalem accepted their vows; and in 1113 the Pope took them under his special protection.

Five years later, shortly after the election of Raymond du Puy as Master, there came a turning-point in the history of the Order. Du Puy had long been concerned at the defenceless state of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, where the dam which the efforts of the first Crusaders had built up against the flood of infidel foes was being rapidly broken down by fresh waves of Mohammedan attack. The cruelty no less than the successes of the Mussulmans seemed to him to call for more vigorous action; to protect Christians was a more useful and to men of that time certainly a more congenial task than to relieve them. He therefore prevailed upon the brethren to become soldiers again, and obtained for them from the Patriarch a dispensation from their renunciation of arms. The work of mercy, indeed, was not to be given up, but merely to be performed by other hands: the Order was divided into three classes,—knights, clergy, and serving brethren —whereof the two latter were to attend the sick and wounded, but now on the battle-field as well as in the hospital.

The argument was plausible, and proved convincing. In theory the knights of the White Cross—a badge which they assumed about this time—were still to be nurses and monks, though they were now to wield the sword of the flesh as well as the sword of the Spirit. Nor did the fact wholly fail to correspond with the theory, for not only in Palestine but in many of the cities and

coast-towns of Europe the hospitals of the Order continued to do a great and beneficent work. But it was by its works not of mercy but of valour that the Order was after this date the more widely known. When two conflicting tendencies appear in an institution, it may be safely predicted that the one which is more in accordance with the spirit of the age will ultimately prevail even against the original ideal with which the institution was founded. The spirit of that age was one of war rather than of philanthropy, and it is not surprising therefore to find that henceforth the prowess of the knights casts their charity into the shade. At any rate, from this time forward the history of the Knights of St. John is a history of the Crusades. They were at once called upon to beat off a determined attack on the city of Antioch, and from that day they and the Templars practically formed the regular militia of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and held the Holy Land for Christendom in the interval between the ebb of one Crusade and the flow of the next.

The triumph of the religious ideal had thus been short-lived, and in the Military Brotherhood of the Knights of St. John, as in those of the Templars and the Teutonic Knights, we find manifested far more of the militant than of the brotherly aspect of Christianity.

This is a convenient place to consider the other religious orders of Knighthood which sprang from the Crusades. For though the Teutonic Knights were so much later than the Knights of St. John and the Temple, they were essentially similar in character, and indeed consciously imitated both the elder bodies in their constitution. It has been seen that the Order of St. John, whose work was at first wholly charitable, soon became partly and even chiefly military in character. The Templars differed from them in having been wholly military from the first. Founded by the nine noble knights who with proud humility had called themselves "the poor fellow-soldiers of Jesus Christ," they had endeavoured to redeem the pledge, taken by them and by thousands of others in accordance with the decree of the great Council of Clermont, to defend the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan. They bound themselves by the three monastic vows, and devoted themselves to the protection of pilgrims, taking their later title of Templars from their occupancy of part of Mount Moriah

where the Temple had stood. But here again the original scope of the brotherhood was soon extended. Just as the Order of St. John had proceeded from the relief to the protection of pilgrims, so it seemed to the Templars that the most effective method of maintaining their power to protect the Christian would be the universal repulse and slaughter of the infidel. They believed in fact in the principle that attack is often the true method of defence. The Templars, therefore, like the Knights of St. John, were soon to be found wherever the fighting was hottest: the Red Cross, which they assumed in the Second Crusade, seemed at times to evoke even more desperate valour than the White Cross of their rivals.

Of the Teutonic Knights there is not much to be said here, for their foundation as a regular order did not take place till a year or two after the loss of Jerusalem had foreshadowed the final expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. For several decades previously, however, individual Germans had as "Hospitallers of the Blessed Virgin" done a charitable work among their countrymen both in Jerusalem and with the armies. These during the siege of Acre were formally incorporated as the Order of Teutonic Knights, which was vowed both to care for the sick and also to fight the infidel. Its constitution was almost identical with that of the other two orders, except that while they each embraced three classes of members,—knights, clergy, and serving-brethren, who might be of any nationality—the new order included only the former, and was open to men of German birth alone. All three orders were, as the historian of the Knights of St. John remarks, at once religious, military, aristocratic, and republican in constitution. Religious, because bound by the vows of Canons Regular. Military, because constantly fighting the infidel. Aristocratic, because governed by one class. Republican, because under the rule of Masters chosen by all the brethren.

Such were the great orders which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were the backbone of the Crusades. If only those are happy whose records are a blank, then surely there were never men so miserable as these knights of the Cross. For wherever Christian and Mohammedan were fighting, there in battle or siege Templars and Hospitallers were to be found in the thickest of the fray.

But as the thirteenth century drew to its close it was evident that this part of their work was nearly done. Jerusalem itself had been lost in 1187, and thenceforward the power of the Crusaders was virtually limited to Acre and the district immediately behind it. When that city fell in 1291 it was plain that the age of the Crusades was over. What more nearly concerns our present purpose, it seemed as if with the final expulsion of the Christians from Palestine the occupation of the Military Brotherhoods was gone. The old order was changing: was there work for them in the new order of things which was coming?

That question each Brotherhood answered according to the faith that was in it. The Templars at any rate seem to have made up their minds that there was no place for them. The few who had escaped from Acre made one last despairing effort to regain a footing in the Holy Land, but when that had been repulsed they allowed themselves to be gradually re-absorbed by the preceptories from which they had issued, and became, as if of deliberate choice, collectively if not individually undistinguishable from the general body of Knighthood. In a few years we find them, forgetful of the Cross they bore, fighting no longer against the infidel but against their fellow-Christians, and taking part, to the horror of the devout, in the struggles between the Houses of Anjou and Aragon or between the Kingdoms of England and Scotland. Nor were other causes of scandal wanting. The preceptories were said to be hotbeds of vice and debauchery. "To drink like a Templar" was already a proverb. The Order was enormously wealthy. In fact, of the three vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the last was the only one which was observed with any strictness, and that was said to be made the excuse for grotesque and blasphemous ceremonies. The verdict of history on many of the charges brought against the Templars has been one of Not Proven, but there was at least some truth in that extraordinary indictment. Their duties in the Holy Land had hitherto provided them with an outlet for their physical energies, a school of discipline, a field of honour, and an ideal of life and conduct: when they abandoned it they became merely a wealthy purposeless order, hateful to the sovereigns of Europe for their independence, to the regular clergy for their privileges,[c] and

[c] They were by special decree of the Popes exempted from episcopal jurisdiction.

to the nobles for their pride, and no longer possessed of any claim to the admiration of Christendom beyond that valour which was common to chivalry in general. The glory which had so dazzled men when it illuminated a powerful body of Christian warriors in Palestine suffered a sad loss of splendour when it was diffused and scattered among countless idle preceptories in Europe. Their fall was thus due not merely to their pride; not merely to their choice of the weaker side in the quarrel between the Papacy at its nadir and the French monarchy in its premature culmination; not merely to their wealth. The Hospitallers were as proud, as loyal to the Pope, and twice as wealthy[d] as the Templars. It was due far less to any of these causes than to their inability to adapt themselves to a new condition of things, and that was itself a consequence of their sudden decline from the high ideal of their order. In well-known words, they had borne, had had patience, had laboured and not fainted. But they had left their first love.

Very different was the fate because very different the conduct of the Hospitallers and the Teutonic Knights. The former still continued to be the pilgrim's friend and the Moslem's foe in the East, but now on sea rather than on land. The latter quitted for ever the scene of their earlier labours, but found in the task of civilizing and Christianizing north-eastern Europe a work even nobler than that from which they had been driven in south-western Asia. *Cœlum non animum mutabant.*

There are few examples of a more rapid adaptation to altered circumstances than that which the Knights of St. John displayed after the fall of Acre. The survivers recoiled to Cyprus and summoned thither at once a general Chapter of the Order. The summons met with a prompt response, and men and money poured in from every preceptory in Europe. It was soon found that there was need of every man and every ducat. Pilgrims still sought the holy shrines, but to reach them they had to elude or repel the swarm of Saracen galleys which swept the Levant. The Knights therefore equipped a fleet, and exchanging the saddle for the deck soon cleared the seas of the enemy. Nor was the internal discipline of the Order neglected. Insubordination and luxury were promptly checked by measures passed at two chapters general, and

[d] Matthew Paris says that the Templars possessed 9,000 manors in Europe, and the Hospitallers 19,000.

the Brotherhood, having thus put its house in order, was ready to take advantage of any opportunity for strengthening itself against the infidel. The opportunity soon came, and with their capture of Rhodes they entered on an era of maritime supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean, which they maintained for nearly six centuries. In every respect therefore their conduct had been the opposite of that of the Templars: the tide of their ardour had flowed out from instead of ebbing back into the preceptories; they had displayed that capacity of adapting themselves to their environment which in the body corporate no less than in the natural body is the surest sign of health; and instead of making the loss of the Holy Land the excuse for dissoluteness of life and dissolution of discipline they had but become the stricter both in morals and in obedience. It is a coincidence too striking to be overlooked that at the very moment when the Grand Master of the Hospitallers came to Poitiers to confer with the Pope and the French King on the project of seizing Rhodes, he found there the Grand Master of the Templars, nominally the guest but actually the prisoner of the two potentates who were even then plotting the destruction of him and his order. It was not only against the Templars that they were scheming. Philip is known to have coveted the property of the Knights of St. John, and the Pope would doubtless have acquiesced in their spoliation, as he did in that of the Templars, if only a decent pretext could have been found. But Villaret's zeal forestalled them, and they were prevented by very shame from hindering so magnificent an achievement as the capture of Rhodes. The conclusion is irresistible. If the Hospitallers had pursued the same policy as their rivals they would have met the same fate.

With their acquisition of Rhodes the whole Order, viewed as a unit under the Grand Master's sovereignty, no less than each individual member of it, entered upon a new stage. In Palestine the Knight had been half nurse and half soldier. In Rhodes there were but few sick who needed his care, but there were many points in his island-home which it was necessary to fortify, and many Saracen ships to drive off the sea. Now therefore he became half engineer and half sailor. In the same way, the Grand Master had been powerful in Palestine as one of the great generals of the Crusades. He now became far more powerful in Europe both as

the head of a sovereign order and as the officer in charge of a great outpost of Christendom within the enemy's lines. The position of Rhodes, indeed, was happily chosen, for it lay at once in the front and on the flank of the Mohammedan advance. While it was held by a power which had virtual command of the seas, the fleets of the Sultan were unable to co-operate effectually with his armies, and the line of possible attack on Western Europe was narrowed down to the valley of the Danube and its tributaries. In the reign of Mahomet II, however, the Turks had already a footing in Italy: had the fall of Otranto been followed immediately by that of Rhodes, Rome herself might have been the seat not of the Vicar of Christ but of the "Shadow of God," and the Christian populations of Tuscany or Piedmont might to-day be flying for refuge into the higher valleys of the Apennines or the Alps. The great Sultan's epitaph shows how clearly he recognised the island to be the bulwark of Christendom. All the many victories he had gained seemed as nothing compared to his one repulse at the hands of the Knights, and he commanded his servants to write over his tomb, "My intention was to have captured Rhodes and to have subjugated Italy."

Forty years later the Knights were compelled to abandon the island by a more furious and sustained attack. But they had held it long enough to save Christendom from Islam: the Turkish Empire was already rotten at the core, and not even the triumphs of Suleiman the Magnificent could revivify it. The strategic instinct of the Knights led them when driven from Rhodes to fall back upon the island of Malta, which commands the narrow passage between the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean. There they took up their old work in a new home, and barred the westward advance of the Turks till the battle of Lepanto nearly half a century later finally crushed the naval power of the Sultan. Having saved Christendom at the crisis of the struggle, the Knights did not relax their efforts as long as any shadow of danger remained, and when the Turkish fleet had at last become powerless for evil, they still did good service in keeping the seas open to trade by attacking the pirate strongholds on the African coast.

Yet it must be confessed that soon after its occupation of Malta the Order began to decline. It was impossible that so vast a

change as was taking place in the religious ideals of the time should not react on the military religious orders. We have seen that when the epoch of the Crusades passed away it had been impossible for the Brotherhoods to maintain their footing in Palestine. When the epoch of the Reformation came, and not only Europe but Christendom began again to be a house divided against itself, the bands also which bound the Brotherhood together were loosed. The same decade which saw the final loss of Rhodes saw too the appearance of Luther at Worms, the publication of the Hundred Grievances, and the sack of Rome. The next saw the kings of England and Portugal appropriating the property of the religious orders in their dominions, and two of the eight "langues"[e] thus lost—though that of Portugal only temporarily—to the Hospitallers. Thus though their attitude towards the Reformation was strictly defined for them both by their geographical position and by their internal constitution, which alike forbade any alliance with the Protestant powers of the north, they were profoundly affected by the course of the Reformation in those distant countries. In losing all their commanderies in England and many of those in Germany they lost men as well as wealth, for the commanderies were their great recruiting-grounds. They also became for the first time out of touch with the progressive spirit of Christianity. Yet while they must have been hostile to the success of the Reformation they were not wholly out of sympathy with its spirit. To them as to the Protestants it was becoming evident that monasticism had had its day. The obligation of celibacy if unenforced would never be observed, and if enforced was unnatural: it was thus either an hypocrisy or a burden too grievous to be borne. It was therefore practically though not formally given up, and the later statutes of the order content themselves with forbidding "all open display of immorality." As with the conception of celibacy, so also with the conceptions of poverty and obedience. The statutes of their order had bound them to poverty. But the refinements of a later day explained that poverty varied in degree, and even distinguished between the three different classes of poverty. There was *Paupertas altissima*, or the absolute surrender of all property whatsoever; there was *Paupertas media*, the poverty of the individual but not of the cor-

[e] The "langues" were racial divisions of the Order.

porate body to which he belonged ; and lastly there was *Paupertas infima*, when the individual was permitted to retain certain kinds of property on certain conditions. The Knights of St. John construed their vow of poverty in the most liberal way, and by their rule that none of the brethren should divert more than a fifth of his goods from the public treasury at his death, implicitly admitted his right to the enjoyment of them all during his life. Lastly, the statutes had bidden each member to obey the orders of the Grand Master. But this command was speedily qualified by the provision that obedience should be rendered only so far as the orders were in accordance with the statutes and customs of the Brotherhood. While, therefore, the creed of the Order was the creed of Catholics, its practice had become in great measure the practice of Protestants, and it is easy to see how terribly such a division of allegiance must have weakened its influence on the powers of Europe. It might well seem that the time was at hand for its final abolition.

The end, however, was not to come for two centuries after what may be called the golden age of the Order,—the age which produced such heroes as D'Aubusson, de l'Isle Adam, and La Valette. A great historian has remarked that "institutions long survive their usefulness: it is when they become actively mischievous that they fall." The remark is especially true of the Knights of St. John. They declined steadily in military importance, in uprightness of life, in strictness of discipline—in everything, in short, except material wealth and worldly prosperity—throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they declined perhaps scarcely more rapidly than Europe in general. It was not till the purifying flame of the French Revolution tried every institution as by fire and made its intrinsic value manifest, that men saw, possibly without surprise but probably not without regret, that the Knights of St. John, like the Knights of the Temple five centuries earlier, were unable to stand the ordeal.

The salient points in the history of the Hospitallers have been noticed at so considerable a length, both because the enormous mass of records in their famous library at Malta has allowed their history to be investigated minutely, and because they have existed as a Military Brotherhood almost within living memory and still exist as a charitable institution.

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The Teutonic Order too has survived into our own century—till, in Carlyle's words, "Napoleon finally ordered the Phantasm to vanish." But after the Reformation it was merely "the most opulent Social Club in existence," and had no claim to be called either a military or a religious order,—or indeed a Brotherhood at all—in any true sense of the words.

As it had been the last of the great Crusading Orders which appeared in the Holy Land, so it was the first to disappear from it. Many of the Knights, indeed, with the High Master at their head, left Palestine in the train of the Emperor Frederick II,—not, however, to be scattered over Germany but to concentrate themselves at Venice, since that city was during the Middle Ages the window through which Europe watched the Orient. There they might have rusted or rioted as the Templars afterwards did, had they not rather anticipated the Hospitallers by seizing the first opportunity of continuing their work under altered circumstances. Before they had been long in Venice their chance came. The Order of Christ, another Military Brotherhood which had been founded some twenty years before for the conquest and conversion of Lithuania and Prussia, found itself unequal to the task. The Bishop of Prussia implored the help of the Teutonic Knights; the Emperor promised to grant them whatever territories they were able to conquer; and the Pope blessed this new Crusade,—a Crusade directed not against Mohammedans but Pagans, but carried on by Mohammedan rather than Pagan methods. The first body of knights set out about the year 1230, and at once entered on this task of enforcing Christianity by means of the sword.

The duties of the Order had thus come to differ as widely as its spheres of action. A few of its members were still to be found fighting and caring for the sick in Palestine; others were occupied with their new work in north-eastern Europe; while Venice continued to be for a while, in fact if not in name, both the headquarters of the Order and the base of supplies for its crusading work. But by the beginning of the fourteenth century its centre of gravity had shifted definitely from the shores of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic to those of the Baltic, and the High Master removed his court to Marienburg. He found the Order at the height of its prosperity. The fortresses which had been

built to hold the heathen Prussians in check were growing into important centres of trade and industry. The Vistula and the Memel and the countless other rivers of this great marshy plain were being embanked and vast tracts of bog reclaimed, so that two blades of corn were growing where one, or none, had grown before. Colonists were streaming in from Germany and bringing with them a more settled system of government. Most important of all, a corresponding change was being wrought in the hearts of the inhabitants. The devotion of generations of missionaries and monks, or the rougher method of the soldiers of the Cross, was at last having its effect, and the Pagans were forsaking their idols and adopting Christianity.

This was the golden age of the Order. Like Aaron's rod it had swallowed the smaller religious brotherhoods—the Order of Christ, the Sword-Brothers, the Knights of Dobryn—and was supreme through a district which stretched from Danzig to the Gulf of Finland. Yet the time of the High Master's arrival was a critical one. We have seen that when the Grand Masters of the Templars and the Hospitallers met at Poitiers the fate of both their orders was hanging in the balance. A similar danger threatened the Teutonic Knights in those very years, for the Archbishop of Riga petitioned the Pope to suppress them as he was suppressing the Templars. But their faith and their works saved them, as the same qualities had saved the Hospitallers. Men who had done and were still doing so great a work could not be lightly dispensed with, and the charges against them were dismissed.

Nevertheless, the very success of the Order was its ruin, for the heathen in their dominions having been conquered and converted, there seemed little left for the knights to do. Had they been bound by no religious vows they might have been gradually absorbed into the general population of Prussia. Had they been bound by no military vow they might have become a community of peaceful monks. Their religious character, however, prevented the one and their military character the other development, and so the ardour which was natural to them, the pride which had been engrafted on them, and the wealth which had accumulated about them alike conspired to tempt them to self-indulgence or self-assertion. The former spirit involved them in troubles in their own dominions : the latter into quarrels with neighbouring powers.

Into the history of their disputes with Poland and their oppression of their own subjects—no longer heathen Prussians, Wends, or Letts, but Christian, free, and independent German colonists—it is unnecessary to enter. Those disputes resulted in the break-up of their rule after invasion from without had aided the revolt within, and in the dismemberment of their territories after an almost incredible expenditure of life and treasure. It is important, however, to note that all this misery might have been avoided if the Order had been wise enough to do in the fifteenth century what under its last High Master the majority of its members did in the sixteenth. That even before the disastrous Battle of Tannenburg it did not confess itself an anachronism and decree its own dissolution, was due to its inability to read the signs of the times and not to the absence of such signs. John Huss read them easily enough and saw what they portended, and indeed some of the Teutonic Knights pressed his teaching to its logical conclusion and demanded from the Council of Constance the dissolution of the Order. But they were overborne by the opinion of an age either unskilled in the symptoms of death, or not yet convinced that what is dead needs speedy burial. A century later, half Germany held Huss for a prophet and Luther for an evangelist, and both Luther and Huss had condemned the principles on which the Teutonic Order was founded. Only one thing could have saved it for a little while,—the discovery of some new field of activity, or of some Thermopylæ where it might protect Christian Germany against heathen or Mohammedan invasion. No such opportunity offered, and the knights—or rather those who were resident in the *Ordensland*—perforce accepted the only alternative, and by renouncing their vows and becoming feudal vassals of the King of Poland ceased to be a Military Brotherhood. The remainder, who were scattered among the various Bailliwicks of the Empire, kept up the name and some of the state of the Order. But its spirit no less than its local habitation has vanished for ever.

It will be well to devote the concluding pages of this essay to a closer consideration of several features hitherto subordinated to historical details.

The full appreciation of the military side of their constitution shown by the Orders has appeared at every step, but it is also

interesting to consider the effect upon them of the complementary conception of Brotherhood. It is to be noticed in this connection then that the ideal of the Universal Brotherhood of men in Christ, on which, as we have seen, the Orders were originally based, underwent a great change when they had attained a fuller growth. Instead of embracing the whole world, the conception of Brotherhood was narrowed down to the exclusion first of Infidels and Pagans, and then successively of heretics and schismatics. It was carried further still. Not only did it exclude all who were not Christians, but it did not include all who were. The Orders were essentially aristocratic in constitution and proud of their exclusiveness. As the late Regius Professor of Modern History has said of the Templars, "they combined in themselves the pride of the only people who had any pride in the Middle Ages,—the pride of the soldier, the pride of the feudal ruler, and the pride of the saint,"—the feeling of superiority, that is, which made the fighting-man despise the peaceful man, made the ruling caste scorn the subject caste, and made those concerned with things eternal look down on those engrossed with things temporal. In no particular does this spirit show itself more plainly than in their treatment of the populations subject to them. We have seen that it was chiefly their oppression of the inhabitants of Prussia which caused the ruin of the Teutonic Knights. The Hospitallers, too, though not guilty of any such active tyranny, yet regarded the natives of Rhodes and Malta as altogether an inferior caste. It was not till they had proved their worth by their heroic resistance to the forces of Mahomet II that the first Rhodians were nominated to an important office in the Order. In Malta, even at a later date, the Maltese were not admitted into the highest class of knights. This haughty attitude, indeed, led them to magnify their office exceedingly. Piety might make a monk out of a peasant. Valour might make a knight out of a simple soldier.[f] But a man who aspired to become one of the knightly monks or monkish knights of the Temple or the Hospital needed in addition to these two virtues the accident of noble birth. No knights of less than four quarterings of nobility—and in some cases of eight or even sixteen—could be admitted

[f] Hallam denies this unless he were of gentle birth. Mills, however, implies it in his description of Chivalry, while Gibbon says that "a valiant plebeian was sometimes enriched and ennobled by the sword."

into the fraternity. On the other hand, the intension of the term was as complete as its extension was limited. Brotherhood meant for them not merely a semi-sentimental tie, but a real living care of each "brother" for all the "brethren," so that each was bidden to consider the honour as well as the welfare of the rest. Thus it was laid down in the rule of the Hospitallers that if one brother shall be detected by his comrades in a fault they are not to denounce him in public, or even to their superior, but are first to chastise him themselves. Quarrels, too, were strictly forbidden, and the extreme penalty of expulsion from the Order was inflicted on any member appealing to a secular person. The Orders therefore represented the brotherhood not of all men, not of all religious men, not of all valiant and religious men, not even of all noble, valiant, and religious men, but the brotherhood only of those noble valiant and religious men who were bound together by the same rule and obligation and acknowledged the same Head.

Again, it may fairly be doubted whether any other institutions have ever been so profoundly affected by the ideals of their times. In their inception they were at once the most splendid embodiment of Christian devotion and the most characteristic development of Christian chivalry, in an age when all Christendom seemed to be both chivalrous and devout. At the height of their renown, when feudalism too was at its height, they represented the purest ideal not perhaps of political but certainly of spiritual feudalism. In their decay, though an interval to be measured by centuries separated the dissolution of one order from that of the next, they have in each case been seen to yield before the irresistible presence of some strange new force; and the fall of the Templars, the loss of Prussia by the Teutonic Order, and the dispersal of the Knights of St. John from Malta were among the earliest signs vouchsafed to Europe of the advent of the successive epochs of national unity under an absolute instead of a feudal monarchy, of the Reformation, and of the French Revolution.

While it thus may be held, as suggested above, that the Orders were *politically* anti-feudal, it is nevertheless true that they were in a special sense a development of feudalism. Chivalry in general and the Military Brotherhoods in particular may be called international or non-national institutions because they owned no allegiance to feudal sovereigns; just as the Crusades were anti-

feudal because the early Crusaders were volunteers and not feudal levies. Yet, though no king and therefore no nation took part in the first Crusade, the Kingdom of Jerusalem which sprang directly from it was not therefore anti-feudal. Rather, it was a spiritual development of feudalism. It presented indeed "the clearest and brightest reflection of the manners and laws of feudal Europe," but it was solemnly declared to be held directly of the Pope. In the same way, all three Orders had a very distinct allegiance—though it was not a feudal allegiance in the ordinary sense—for they were all under the especial protection of the Holy See. The Pope confirmed their establishment in the first instance, he issued subsequent regulations for their guidance, and so absolute was their devotion to his commands that the surviving knights of the Temple acquiesced with apparent cheerfulness in the Papal decree which abolished their order. It is evident therefore that feudalism, though in a different form, had its influence on them as on Europe in general. Their convent, their preceptories, their exemption from tithe and interdict, the existence of their Order, their position as the one regular crusading force: these were the fiefs for which they did a sort of spiritual homage to the Popes.

As regards every other power in Europe except the spiritual, however, the Orders were strictly opposed to feudalism, and their very dependence on the Popes emphasized this attitude. Fiction is not always a trustworthy guide, but the hostility of the Templars and Hospitallers to Richard I, which is so strikingly depicted in "The Talisman" and "Ivanhoe," has a foundation in fact. So, too, in the quarrel between Gregory IX and Frederick II, though the Teutonic Knights as Germans supported their Emperor, the two elder Orders took the side of the Pope, and Frederick retaliated by confiscating much of their property. The animosity of Philip of France against the Templars, which was due partly to his anxiety to possess himself of their wealth, was due probably far more to his impatience of their independence. For, not merely as representing an *imperium in imperio* but as owing an external allegiance, they were a real danger to feudal monarchies, whether those monarchies were of the usual disorganized Continental type, or of the centralized English type, or again of that more absolute type still of which the reign of Philip

the Fair is an example. The profound effect of contemporary ideals upon the Orders is therefore to be traced both in their peculiar conception of a spiritual feudalism, and also in their adherence to it rather than to a feudalism of a temporal character.

In continuation of this line of thought, a third point presents itself. For it is startling to think to what use the Popes might have turned their allegiance had Boniface VIII been able to achieve that amalgamation of the three Brotherhoods which he attempted. He was already, in Dean Milman's words, "the general-in-chief of the armies of the faith": had he become the colonel of the combined military orders the work of the Jesuits would have been anticipated by two centuries and would have been performed by rougher hands. The Military Orders, like the Jesuits in later times, differed from the purely Religious Orders in being formed for action and not for contemplation; their obedience would have been transferred from the Masters to the Popes; the Papacy would have wielded in fact and not only in theory the temporal as well as the spiritual sword; and Rome would once more have been dominated by a Prætorian Guard. But the ascendancy which such a Papal army would have implied would have been dangerous both to the political and to the religious life of Europe. The disasters of the Captivity and the Schism might have been averted, but Christendom would have been crushed beneath the secular as well as the religious autocracy of the Pope. The scheme, fortunately, was not carried out. There was, indeed, no one moment at which it was possible. When, a century before the pontificate of Boniface VIII, it had suggested itself to the ambition of Innocent III, many towns of Palestine were still in Christian hands, and though Jerusalem was lost, pilgrims still sought admission to the holy shrines. The work of "the garrison of Palestine" was plainly too important to be then interrupted. Again, when the Holy Land was finally abandoned, the Orders had already begun to adapt themselves to their altered circumstances. The Teutonic Knights had long since found another mission in Prussia, and by the time the news of the fall of Acre reached Europe the Hospitallers had entered on a new sphere of action in Cyprus. Only the Templars were available for the Pope's purpose, and the Templars were already in the toils of the King of France. Soon afterwards, the Papacy

became for seventy years a French archbishopric, and it was not to be expected that Philip would permit Clement to obtain the aid of an Order whose property he coveted and whose independence galled him. By the suppression of the one Brotherhood and the remoteness of the other from Rome the Hospitallers remained the only possible candidates for the position. But even if they had not had sufficient occupation in Rhodes and Malta, the duty was one which they became increasingly reluctant to fulfil. They were by this time becoming gradually estranged from their spiritual head on account of the constant disputes about the exercise of temporal patronage; the Schism in the Papacy caused a corresponding schism in the Order; and the murder, by Alexander VI, of Djem, who had placed himself under the protection of the Knights, excited in them very natural feelings of distress and resentment. Loyola's conception, in fact, was more suited to the reactionary age of the Counter-Reformation than to that which was experiencing the stirrings of the Intellectual Revolution.

For social and military reasons, too, it was well for Europe that each order continued its separate work, and that it vanished when its work was done. The Brotherhoods were essentially a caste, more exclusive even than that French *noblesse* which nothing less than a Revolution could extinguish. Their privileges were as anomalous, their pride as high, their position would have been even more isolated, for they would have stood alone not merely against "the people" of France, but against the peoples of a whole continent. It has been suggested that the intellectual revolt of the sixteenth century would have found them on the side of authority. So too, in that religious revolt of German states against enforced religious unity which marked the seventeenth century, they would have been on the Catholic or Austrian side, and in the social revolt of the eighteenth century they would have been found on the side of privilege. And it is to be noticed that this attitude would have been directly due, in part at least, to their military theory. It was not so much that all Chivalry was opposed to the new development of the art of war which followed the introduction of gunpowder: the Knights of the Hospital proved at Rhodes and Malta that they could handle guns as dexterously as swords. It was rather that by their very con-

stitution they represented a force which so early as the fourteenth century was becoming antiquated. The victories of yeomen or burghers over knights and men-at-arms at Creçy, Poitiers, and Sempach inflicted a mortal wound on Chivalry; and though Chivalry survived for a while it was only because there was as yet no other military institution to elbow it aside. The growth of standing armies, however, at length supplanted it, as centralized monarchy was supplanting feudalism, and in a standing army a Military Brotherhood owing allegiance only to its own Master could have no place. Thus the social development of modern Europe must have been hindered by the survival of a privileged caste, and its military development by the survival of a separate fighting caste,—results respectively unwelcome, though perhaps not equally unwelcome, to the social and to the military reformer.

Lastly, as contemporary ideals had acted on the Orders, so the Orders reacted on their contemporaries. Not to speak of their direct effect on their times—of their social influence as the lords and vigilant stewards of great estates in every country of Europe, of their economic influence as the protectors and therefore the fosterers of the sea-borne commerce of the Mediterranean, of their military influence as the successors of the legions of the Roman Empire and the forerunners of the regular armies of modern times—they exercised an incalculable influence by their steady maintenance of an ideal. Hallam remarks that it was the business of Chivalry to animate and cherish the feeling of honour,—one of "the three powerful spirits which have from time to time moved over the face of the waters." And though the Military Brotherhoods, the sublimation of Chivalry, were unable, owing to the isolation of the various orders and their successive disappearances from the scene, to act in conscious combination for the maintenance of this sentiment, yet individually each held up a lofty standard of conduct for some country or age.

Thus, early in the twelfth century, the well-known words in which St. Bernard contrasts the conduct of the Templars with that of ordinary Knights echoed through Christendom:—"They are never idle nor rambling about . . . . they detest gambling and dice . . . . they abominate all shows, drolls, discourses or songs of a loose nature . . . . their arms are their only finery . . . . all their confidence is in the Lord of Hosts." A little later, one Pope

called them "the new Maccabees," and another "the firmest support of the Church in the East": a king of Hungary compared them in action to Martha and in devotion to Mary, while a king of Jerusalem declared that in them "next to God, is placed our entire reliance." Of their bravery in the field it seems almost unnecessary to speak: from some battles not a single Templar or Hospitaller escaped; only a handful survived the loss of Acre; the sieges of Rhodes and Malta more than decimated the ranks of the defenders. But their endurance in captivity was even more remarkable, for "there is hardly a recorded instance in which a Templar saved his life by abandoning his faith."[g] Nor was it merely that by their steadfastness and valour they kept up the high standard which they had inherited: they were in many instances the pioneers of a new order of things, and de Duisson and Amaury, who were the real generals of the Third Crusade, were perhaps the first instances in modern Europe of the professional as distinct from the royal general. In one more particular their conduct stood out in strong relief. They were a standing protest against that accommodation with "the Infidel" which, beginning soon after the Last Crusade, became in later centuries the regular policy of one European nation, and has had important effects upon the attitude of almost every other. Within twenty years of the capture of Constantinople, the rulers of Venice, acting on the principle "Venetians first and Christians afterwards," had made a treaty with the Turks. Francis I sought their alliance against Charles V. Charles V was so engrossed in his quarrel with Francis that he left Belgrade to its fate. Even the Popes in many cases confined their zeal in the cause of the Church to words. But the Knights of St. John were always the inflexible foes of the Sultans, and, not content with their work in the Mediterranean, sent many of their number to join in the defence of Belgrade.

Such a conception of their mission may seem to us a narrow one. The brotherhood of man is again becoming an ideal which many hope may yet be realised. But while Mohammedanism had the strength to be aggressive it was only by force that it could be repelled, and the Military Orders, as we have seen, were the only institutions which could be counted on for consistent and

[g] Professor Froude.

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effective resistance. It would rather be well to consider whether they or some modern equivalent may not yet find a mission. The Templars and the Teutonic Knights have disappeared, though the historian of the former avers that a constant succession of Grand Masters has been maintained down to the present century. The Order of St. John, however, still survives, and has of late years shown its vitality in founding the *Society for the Aid of Sick and Wounded in War.* It has thus after the lapse of eight centuries reverted to its original character. Is it impossible that it may once more develop on its former lines, and again afford protection to the Christians of the East?

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